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Fieldwork on Foot: Perceiving, Routing, Socializing

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Walking around is fundamental to the everyday practice of social life. It is also fundamental to much anthropological fieldwork, and we would like to start by recalling a well-known anecdote of walking and (as it turns out) running in the field, from Clifford Geertz (1973: 413–17). He tells of how, at the start of his Balinese fieldwork, he and his wife were apparently ignored by villagers, who simply looked through them as though they were not there. As they wandered around the village, Geertz recalls, they felt as ephemeral and insubstantial as a cloud or a gust of wind. But all that abruptly changed when, during a police raid on a cockfight they had come to watch, they found themselves having to turn and run with the rest of the crowd. The villagers were amazed that their privileged anthropological visitors had not simply identified themselves to the police, but had instead accompanied them in their flight. From then on, Geertz says, their field-work opened out successfully. With the run, it seems, the anthropologists suddenly came down to earth, were able to make their bodily presence felt, and could thenceforth participate with the villagers in the ebb and flow of everyday life.

As this example shows, walking does not, in and of itself, yield an experience of embodiment, nor is it necessarily a technique of participation. Rather, both embodiment and participation presuppose some kind of attunement, such that both the ethnographer's pedestrian movements and those of the people she or he is with are grounded in shared circumstances. This is what happened when Geertz, along with everyone else, ran from the police. All at once he felt embodied, and was able to participate. Or to put it another way, we cannot simply walk into other people's worlds, and expect thereby to participate with them. To participate is not to walk *into* but to walk *with* – where 'with' implies not a face-to-face confrontation, but heading the same way, sharing the same vistas, and perhaps retreating from the same threats behind.

In this chapter we explore in more detail the relationship between practices of walking, the experience of embodiment and forms of sociability, both in everyday

life and in the conduct of anthropological fieldwork. The fact that we are focusing on the *relationship* between walking, embodiment and sociability is crucial. That is, we do not assume *a priori* that walking affords an experience of embodiment, or that social life hovers above the road we tread in our material life. Rather, walking affords an experience of embodiment to the extent that it is grounded in an inherently sociable engagement between self and environment.

These ideas are the basis for our research under the title of 'Culture from the Ground: Walking, Movement and Placemaking'.[1] Through ethnographic fieldwork carried out in 2004 and 2005 in the region of Aberdeen and north-east Scotland we have sought to understand the diversity of walking in the area. Fieldwork has involved participant observation, in the form of sharing walks with a variety of people, observation and 'autoethnography' of walking in different environments, twenty-five semi-structured interviews with people interested in the topic, and archival research on the history and material culture of walking. In addition, some walkers compiled walking diaries (recording and commenting on all their outdoor walking over the course of a week), and digital photographing and sound recording of field environments have been carried out. Running through all these techniques has been an idea of mobility in fieldwork, where the journeys people make also make their places and, as a corollary, the ethnographic field itself. Journeys made on foot have particularly social characteristics and, again as a corollary, fieldwork on foot – whilst by no means uncommon in anthropology – is worth considering in its own right.

The chapter is structured around a number of resonances between walking and anthropological fieldwork, through which we draw attention to a dialectic involving fieldwork practice and the content of research. They are resonances in the sense of reinforcing certain meanings within each other. Firstly, the repeated action of putting one foot in front of the other necessitates contact with the ground and, often, a state of being attuned to the environment. Together these bring to mind the detail and directness of ethnography. Accounts of 'being there', in the anthropological field (e.g. Watson 1999), usually result from being metaphorically and literally on the ground. In this way anthropologists can perceive the multi-sensory environment to the fullest, and can claim to be close to whatever is happening in the area.

Another resonance can be felt in the way that the locomotive (or getting around) aspect of walking allows for an understanding of places being created by routes. A place walked through is made by the shifting interaction of person and environment, in which the movement of the whole body is important rather than just an act of vision outwards from a fixed point. In walking we are on the move, seeing and feeling a route ahead of us and creating a path around and after us. We can often explore a new place most fruitfully by walking through and around it. For the anthropologist, this in turn leads to the realization that we have to understand the routes and mobilities of others.

Finally, there is also something distinctive about the sociability that is engendered by walking *with* others. A person walking generates a particular style of movement, pace and direction that can be understood as a 'rhythm' of walking. Sharing or creating a walking rhythm with other people can lead to a very particular closeness and bond between the people involved, as Geertz demonstrated. This physical co-presence, emphasized by common movements, is also important in ethnography as we attempt to live and move as others do. The sociability of walking could be seen to be analogous to the sociability of ethnographers and their subjects.

Perceiving Self and Environment

In Europe and America, and particularly within the Romantic tradition, walking has been associated with a closeness to nature and attention to detail in the environment that are seen to have been otherwise lost in modern life (Wallace 1993). Walking could then be an activity through which modernity can be resisted or reworked. Nancy Frey (1998) presents contemporary pilgrims to the shrine of St James in Santiago de Compostella in north-west Spain in this light. Those who make the pilgrimage often feel an affinity with those who have walked and ridden the same ways over the last thousand years, frequently along routes of many hundreds of kilometres and taking months to complete. Parallel to this, walking has also been associated with thinking and a philosophical bent to life. Orlet (2004) cites Erasmus, Hobbes, Rousseau and Nietzsche among many others in this regard, but in doing so questions are raised about walking in more ordinary circumstances. To what extent are these rather deep connections between walking pilgrimage and philosophy made in everyday life, for example? Here the focus is on what actually happens during a walk that might lead to particular perceptions of the body, self and environment. The ethnographer, walking along too, has to begin a similar interrogation, and this is the point of entry to our first resonance between walking and anthropological fieldwork.

During interviews and participant observation in our research, walkers described and demonstrated three different 'modes' of interaction with the environment. In interviews they often stressed, on the one hand, the opportunities to look around and, on the other, the time for thinking that walking provides. During walks themselves, a third perspective, that of embodied experience, often came to the fore in conversations and through the events of the walk itself. The walking diaries also seemed to give walkers a certain freedom to express themselves in relation to their experiences. We will discuss each of these themes here.

Firstly, looking around is usually possible in a walk to a much greater extent than in other ways of travelling, and this is a basic but important factor in why people walk. One of the reasons for this is simply the pace of the walk, in the sense

of the experience of speed or slowness that it provides. A number of walkers said that walking involves moving slowly in such a way that allows them to notice the details in local environments. One walker tied his experience as a surveyor to his enjoyment of urban areas.

> I mean, certainly, you see a lot more when you're walking. Driving, you look at the road ahead, or should be. And I think there's a lot to be seen: Aberdeen's a very lovely city, and the buildings are absolutely fantastic. And being from a construction background, I tend to look up, wherever I go. Whether it's New York or Sydney, the only way to see is from the ground level: on your feet, wandering around … finding little lanes and places, and things that people who live there won't even see.

Here the walker contrasts his vision with that of the driver. Although both driver and walker are moving, it is the walker who seems to have a real mobility, in terms of the ability to see in different directions and to discover the 'little' things in his or her surroundings. The driver is instead cocooned or encased in his or her vehicle. This quality of walking is similar to that described by Adam Reed (2002) in his ethnography of London tour guides, who found the most significant meaning in the small stories of back streets rather than the more famous tourist sites. In our Aberdeen walker's case, the perspective of looking up 'from the ground' is emphasized, a much wider vista than that of the driver who focuses on the middle distance of the road ahead.

In contrast to this slow-paced, looking-around walk, sometimes walkers feel they are moving quickly, and here walking is understood as an efficient way to get around urban areas in particular. Walking can afford a freedom of passage in a fast walk that cuts through the crowd, which is unavailable to vehicles on busy roads or in traffic jams. Instead of making an absolute measurement of speed, we can see how variations in pace affect the experience of the walk and the environment. Different kinds of attentiveness and walking skills become apparent through the extent to which individual walkers move quickly or slowly, relative to themselves.

Understanding difference over time in the environment is another judgement that depends on the variety of experiences a walker has, rather than being an intrinsic feature of that environment. Frequent repetition of the same route may lead the walker to notice tiny changes in buildings, gardens or fields and to construct an ongoing narrative of place through these experiences. On the other hand, apprehending the place can occur on a larger scale, in which a walk contributes to a different kind of story, with longer-term histories. In Aberdeen the main building material has traditionally been granite, and granite buildings are often recognized and appreciated for their distinctiveness by people who walk around them. During our fieldwork one keen walker ran a series of guided history walks, in which participants were encouraged to notice and share stories about the granite industry. The city was articulated into its region by a network of quarries and building sites,

and the labour of those who had worked them. Relating to the granite during a walk can pull the city together as a material entity, with a long coherence over time in its regional setting.

Just as it is possible in a walk to see the world unfolding around oneself, so some walkers also describe a sense of escape from the world, or at least its immediate demands. The 'thinking time' that is available during a walk is often a comment on the busyness of other environments, the demands for immediate attention that prevent what might be seen as a more reflective state. One informant told me that his walks to church by himself were an opportunity for personal reflection. Writing to me on the subject, he later explained that 'This is a time when I have no other calls on my senses or intellect (TV, PC, newspaper, other people), during which I can think about something that needs thinking about.' This might relate to his work or to spiritual matters. He continued: 'The act of walking to church is fortuitous in that it gives me this period of time. I don't walk to church as a way of having this kind of time. It is a by-product of that form of travel.'

People who walk to work in the mornings were also often keen to assert this benefit of walking. Here we can link 'ordinary' walking to that of the philosophers identified by Orlet. It offers the possibility of thinking in a different way, more freely and without distraction or need of distraction from boredom. For our informants, the walk could be a chance to plan the work day before it begins in earnest, or to gradually (in keeping, perhaps, with the pace of walking) turn over problems or issues in the mind. The walk home, however, often varies according to the happenings of the day. One walker discussed this during such a walk:

> It depends really on what sort of day I've had. And like this afternoon was a good day, a good afternoon. Working with the public, they were all nice people. Last week I had someone being really horrible to me, and I was furious – I stormed home. You know, and it was raining, and I was in a foul temper, so I didn't manage to walk out my temper last week.

One beneficial effect of the walk home can be to ameliorate the effects of a bad day, or to walk out one's temper, as this walker puts it. Yet the point is made that while walking can make one feel better, it is not always an escape because the walk will be influenced by one's recent experiences. This is a description of how emotions are realized through walking. Emotions can be channelled through, and even become, the movement of the body. The fury *is* the storming home, a full bodily expression to the self and the world.

During this walk home, our informant described her movements at work as 'running' between objects (such as the desk and photocopier) and people, resulting in a 'bitty' series of movements. She could not get the rhythm of a walk 'like this', she said, as we walked up the street, and would occasionally engineer a short trip out of the office. People who walk at lunchtimes also describe similar experiences.

At Aberdeen beach people often walk alone during lunch breaks from work. The beach is just within reach of the town centre and a brisk walk there can be fitted into a lunch hour. These lunch-time walkers were most likely to mention the 'escape' aspect to the walk, in contrast to 'strollers' who, during conversations about their walk, often brought up the state of the environment at the beach or the kinds of social interaction they have there. From observations, the lunch-time walkers tend to walk more quickly than the strollers, often striding along the flat, obstacle-free promenade, although not necessarily looking around them less than the strollers. Walks to and from work can become a kind of liminal period between what are usually far more structured work or home environments at each end, and the kinds of bodily movement involved seem to be something of a relief from both. This is not to suggest that the body is at all static just because it is indoors, but the rhythms of movement are very different and people draw attention to the specific qualities of the outdoors.

So far, we have described a kind of double awareness in walking. Firstly, walkers can progress outwards to perceive their surroundings in a detailed way, and secondly, they can also turn inwards to the realm of thoughts and the self. In between such outward and inward perceptions, however, there can arise a directness to some of the feelings and experiences generated by walking. One walker used the opportunity of a walking diary to volunteer a list of likes and dislikes about, as she put it, 'walking (in Aberdeen)'. She merged thoughts on walking generally with walking specifically in Aberdeen. Her lengthy list of likes ends with the following:

> Finding objects dropped by others
> Hearing different bird calls, varying through the year, in still quiet places
> The sound of my own footsteps
> The wind in the trees – all strengths
> Crisp, new snow – to be the first to walk in it
> The ever-changing weather, and closeness to nature, make even very familiar walks unique every time.

For this walker, the boundaries between the body and the environment are blurred by the movements of both. Indeed, everything seems to be moving. The walker catches both transient and rhythmical sound, imprints herself into snow and is attentive and reactive to both 'objects' and the weather. The wind is in the trees and around the body, and its variations produce reactions in sound and movement everywhere. We could suggest that the walker engages neither in a one-way visual looking out, nor in a turning inwards to the self. Instead we see the co-production of a walking experience between environment and person, both of which are in flux. The eyes, furthermore, seem rather secondary to the feet, ears and skin in terms of how the environment is perceived. This is the case even (or, it could be

argued, especially) in these most basic and everyday experiences that the walker describes.

A further small example can illustrate the point. In another diary a walker described her feelings of walking home from work on a sunny day after two days of rain and cloud. The first description of the weather on this day is 'Sunny!', and she comments, again quite simply: 'Beautiful to be out in the sun again.' Here we feel the movement from the enclosing 'in' of a building to the enveloping or immersing 'in' of weather.[2] Perhaps the difference is in the accompanying movement and responsiveness of the outdoor environment, as opposed to the structuring force of indoors. Indoors the body may move, but the freedom of movement outside is usually qualitatively different for the walkers – a feeling of moving at an appropriate pace for the environment.

In discussing the weather, we can return to the articulation of fury through walking described above. With the interjection of 'you know, and it was raining', the walker described her body as resonating with the weather. The state of distress is not an internal reflection of mood, cut off from the environment. Rather, the weather complements and becomes part of the emotion, and each reinforces the other in the production of the walk. The storm is a physical reality both in the weather and in the person, as the walker attunes to the weather rather than 'huddling' or defending herself from it. These examples illustrate how the weather is made real and substantial by the bodily movement in it. Otherwise it is conjectural, how it looks and might feel, rather than something actually felt. The emotionality of weather relates strongly to the body–environment interaction under discussion here, as do other kinds of emotions produced through walking. Fear, in particular, could be usefully explored further from this perspective, where walkers perceive danger in their surroundings and move in a state of fear as a result. In the city this is often, but not always, in relation to the presence of other people in particular circumstances: at night, in quiet or hidden areas, or where alcohol is likely to have been consumed.

These realizations of emotional and environmental conditions through walking are situated somewhere between an external looking-out vision and an internal escape or self-reflective vision. They are processes of lived and embodied experience in which the environment shifts and imprints onto the body, and is at the same time affected by it. The potential for these very real experiences to occur is part of the attraction of walking for many people, and yet there are also circumstances in which the directness of social contact with others is something to be feared.

In summary, we have three ways of conceptualizing the relationships between the bodies and environments of these Aberdeen walkers. The walker may look (or 'sense') around, appropriating the environment around him or her by noticing its details and changes. Alternatively, the walk may be a time to turn inward to the

self, to produce a particular state of body or mind. Although by no means cutting themselves off from the environment, these walkers emphasized sensory perception less than the thoughts, memories and stories in the mind. Thirdly, we have processes in which other senses come to the fore, producing an awareness and, sometimes, a crossing of the boundary between body and environment through the embodied and emotional interactions of walkers and their surroundings (including their social surroundings). The skin as a sensory organ is important here.

The description of these modes helps explicate the first resonance between walking and anthropological fieldwork outlined in the introduction, that of the ethnographer's groundedness in his or her research field. The differences between looking out onto a research field, using the presence in the field for personal reflection on the self, and engaging in the embodied experiences and practices of the field hint at alternative modes for the ethnographer that in themselves could be traced through different visions of anthropological fieldwork. In terms simply of methodology books in anthropology, one could read a similar set of contrasts into the differences between, for example, the more positivistic 'looking out' techniques – towards formal or structured forms of data collection – described by Bernard (1988) and to some extent Ellen (1984), the methodological reflexivity of Davies (1999), and Coffey's (1999) encouragement of embodied fieldwork.

Walkers, however, describe these three different types of perception or experience in ways that are not at all in conflict with each other. The looking-around perception, the personal reflection and the category of embodied experience can occur through the course of a few days or even within one walk, although it is also true that a single walk may have more meaning for the walker in one of these modes than in the others. Different techniques or modes often seem to be present and to overlap in walking, much as in fieldwork when different kinds of observation and participation are used. Fieldwork on foot allows for such flexibility, while, it would be hoped, maintaining the overall coherence of the project. At this stage we should consider the course of an entire walk: the journey and the direction the walk takes. In doing so we move away from the details of the interaction between the person and environment at any given point on the walk and towards what the line of the walk means. We encounter the routes and the creativity of place-making, and this is the second of our resonances between walking and anthropological fieldwork.

Routes: The Creation of Place in Walking

We begin this section with more from our fieldwork. During a Monday morning walk to work, a walker told of how he had returned to live in a certain area of town after some years' absence. We talked about our activities and our routes through and around this part of Aberdeen, such as where to get the bus to the supermarket

and where certain pubs were, for example. Through these mundane details, the city can be understood from the perspective of a life story, tying a personal biography into the perception of the city environment – in this episode, when a person moves to an area and how life changes as a result. This is much as Finnegan (1998) discusses in the life stories of residents of Milton Keynes in England, who weave together their biographies in relation to the places in which they have lived. From our perspective, such conversations taking place *as* we walk show how temporality in walking can be shifting and unsettled: thinking and perceiving the past, present and future, and combining them in references to routes. From our ethnography again, written by Lee:

> We continued down the road, and then turned off into a back street. I think I must have slowed slightly and looked up at the unfamiliar street, and the change in my posture registered with my fellow-walker. 'A route I discovered yesterday,' he said. 'Well not really discovered.' 'But you tried it,' I suggested.
>
> 'Yes, because it's handy. I have this exploration feeling.'
>
> 'Ah.'
>
> 'Something, try something different. It's crazy, I feel like I can't really afford doing so during weekdays.'
>
> 'Because weekdays is ...'
>
> 'I don't know, weekdays is about other things, I suppose you're always worried about how you do your job, on time.'

For this walker, the weekend is a time for exploration, a walk that tries something different, when the environment is something to be (almost) discovered. During the week, it seems, our jobs rule our lives to the extent that we dare not step out from the known, tried-and-tested route towards the locale of work. We may become familiar with more routes as we test out, wander or search during different times and types of walk, and yet we are careful to avoid such risky behaviour if it might impact on our work lives. It seems that the status of a destination can affect the way we walk towards it. We also need to bear in mind that not all walking will have a specific destination, as Wallace (1993) shows in the development of a 'peripatetic' genre of literature that includes Wordsworth and Coleridge, who walked not to get somewhere in particular, but for the sake of the experience of walking itself.

There are different ways of making and remembering routes, and there is variety in how what might be called the 'aspect' of the body is formed: exploring, wandering, foraging or approaching a goal, for example. Connerton (1989) analyses the body as a site for collective memory, in which habituated bodily actions are the basis for the ability to reproduce a certain social performance. We could perhaps read into the variability of this walker's routes an embodied performance of a work persona in the difference between weekend and weekday walking.

More practically, the 'exploration feeling' is an important quality to some walking that is worth following up here. Lorimer and Lund (2003) describe navigation in mountain hiking as a highly structured and planned process that begins with a visualization of the landscape through the contours of a map and continues with detailed use of a map and compass, or even a hand-held Geographical Positioning System device. While more improvised practices are also present in hill walks, such as responsiveness to weather and the terrain as encountered, participants in our study have expressed through their walks a keenness to explore the city in a relatively unplanned way. To some extent this is related to the predominant construction of risk in mountain environments, which leads walkers, or at least the leaders of hikes, to take every precaution against getting lost. The dangers of getting lost in the city are generally perceived as much less, even though fear of other kinds of situation is undoubtedly present. On the other hand, the positive ways in which urban walkers choose and find routes around their city attest to the importance of creativity in everyday walking.

The skills and habits of wayfinding are therefore open to investigation here. Given the preponderance of the map in modern navigation and the apparent clarity of the city's relationship to the map – where streets equal routes – it is possible to follow up de Certeau's assertion that, owing to the wanderings and networks of its people, 'a migrational, or metaphorical city thus slips into the clear text of the planned and readable city' (1984: 93) As the walker in the previous example showed, by no means do we always use maps to find a route. Yet there is a relationship between the 'map' in a broader sense – the planned and readable city, often thought of as being looked down upon from above, as de Certeau (ibid.: 91) described in his view of Manhattan from the World Trade Center – and the city as lived on the ground, discovered, appropriated or engaged with by people. We can consider the relationship between city (and indeed countryside) planning and the lived experience of people on the ground in a parallel fashion, being open to potential subversions and alternative discourses. It is also not simply a question of 'domination' from above and 'resistance' from below, as de Certeau tended to suggest. The lines and routes of walkers are made through everyday choices and actions.

Elsewhere Ingold (n.d.) contrasts the line that is created as the trace of a free-flowing movement, as a person makes his or her way through an unfolding landscape, with the line that connects predetermined points of arrival and departure, between which the traveller does not move but is rather transported or 'carried across'. Places, in the first case, are actually constituted by the movements to, from and around them. In the city, from the point of view of a walker, the streets form a set of possibilities for routes. Yet the particular path chosen is almost always meaningful for the walker, in denial of the apparent random element in moving through the city. The 'line' created will be rich in the memories and experiences that are formed by moving, by the encounters that occur and the changes in the

environment. Hurrying, the walker will seek a direct route. But the road also needs to afford easy passage and to allow crossing at appropriate points if necessary. Seeking quietness, or 'nature', the walker will find routes that avoid busy roads or are flanked by pleasant gardens, parks or waterways. The walker quoted at the beginning of this chapter often seeks architectural pleasure, the 'little lanes and places', or a feeling of being off the beaten track. A keen rural walker, similarly, showed how he enjoys seeking out old country roads and paths that have often fallen into disuse. There are also many examples in our research of short, oft-repeated walks to shops, bus-stops, other houses and circuits around the city that, in their repetition, come to represent what might be seen as 'thick lines' of un-thought-of but nevertheless important and meaningful place-making. Before starting this research, Lee reflected on one of his regular routes:

> I enjoy crossing the road over to Spar in the morning to buy groceries. The walk is about 100 yards. Crossing the road releases me from the constriction of the pavement. It allows me to admire the architecture of the street buildings, otherwise hidden from view by perspective. I see the sky and the road – horizons open. I like being able to cross the street without waiting for some minutes for a gap in the traffic, or for the authority of the traffic lights to tell me when to cross: I live in a relatively quiet city. I like looking in the shop windows as I pass. The cheeriness of Sandra the shop assistant. I like feeling I have the time to enjoy it. I cross the street diagonally, looking up or down it, walking along the street, not just across it.

Lee now feels rather strongly the partiality of this walk, as elsewhere in the city there is busyness, stressed commuting and indeed fear, as already noted, in addition to the partiality of his own situation in writing this (having a shop close by and the time and money to spend there). It is in these ways, however, that walkers come to know the city and its surroundings. Walking for many is an act they make real, moving through and thereby creating particular places – although socially grounded, as we have argued, the walker figures as a subject in a specific environment, as opposed to being just a member of a larger social grouping. By creating routes, walkers inscribe their own lives into the city, if only for the transient moments when they pass along. The meaning of the place is constituted by their bodily presence, and although the specific intent or emotional state of the walker may be hidden to a greater or lesser degree, the route is actually made real by the walker. It is the presence of people that makes what is sometimes thought of as the 'living street'.[3] Repeated walks produce a thicker association of the route with the walker. From this emerges a distinctive relationship of place, in the interaction between the walker and the meaningful environment.

We can also contrast route-making in urban areas with countryside or mountain walking. Our fieldwork has also taken us to the agricultural regions around Aberdeen, and to the hills and mountains of north-east Scotland beyond. In these

environments, there is an even greater directness in the relationship between the routes of walkers and their environments. Each footstep may leave a mark, plants pushed out of the way, and trodden earth and stones leaving a record of the linear movement over and through them. The route becomes embedded into the landscape in a way that is usually not possible in urban areas, where pavements and road surfaces are virtually impervious to the effects of walkers, if not to heavier traffic. This is partly why in the city the bodily presence of the walker counts for so much. The route is made by and as the person walks. It disappears as soon as the person moves on, although over time it may produce other traces: pedestrian crossings built at popular crossing points, or shops opened to catch passing trade. An exception, of course, is when a fresh snowfall in the city provides the opportunity physically to imprint one's own route and to see and feel the routes of others. We see the busy places and the quiet. The pleasure of walking in newly fallen snow – and in looking behind us to see our footprints – is related to the creation of a visible route, as well as the tactility of the foot and snow.

Our second resonance between walking and anthropological fieldwork therefore calls attention to the specificities of the route. Understanding the routes taken and being formed by the participants in research is important because it grounds them within trajectories of movement. This could be extended to life-course and biography, or, more literally, to way of life. A way of life is rarely mapped out clearly in advance, but is rather produced along the way, 'continually worked out anew' (Ingold 2000: 242), and thus betokens the active participation of the person who makes it. Much as we have followed and taken part in the everyday walking routes of our informants, so we have had insights into their wider ways of life: their biographies of home, work, leisure and movement.

We can make a comparison here with James Clifford's writing on routes. He explores routes through the 'specific histories, tactics, everyday practices of dwelling and traveling: traveling-in-dwelling, dwelling-in-traveling' (1997: 36). Dwelling is indeed central to route-making, in that immersion in a lifeworld must be a precondition for finding one's way through it. However, Clifford's routes are mostly international and indeed intercontinental movements of people and goods, in the context mainly of museums and diasporic communities. The focus is on how identity and meaning are formed through these processes. The examples amassed by Clifford of distinctive spatialities, or concepts of spatial relations, underline the importance of knowing where and how such movement occurs. But 'everyday practices' also need to include the ways that the very places between which Clifford sees movement as happening are themselves being formed by movement – there is no simple inside and outside, perhaps, to these places. People not only move between places, but also form them by movement itself. By the interweaving of routes over time or concurrently, a place is made.

The Sociability of Walking

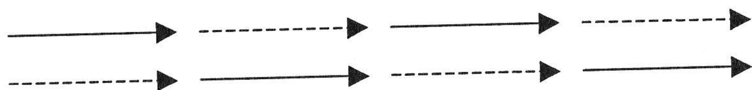
John Urry (2002, 2003) has noted the continuing need for physical 'co-presence' in the functioning of social life, where people need to travel in order to meet each other face-to-face, to visit certain places or fulfil various obligations in person, despite the often geographically distant locations from which they start and the availability of modern communications technologies. Urry also describes the disruption of the pleasures and usefulness of walking by 'fast' means of mechanized transport, by 'the speed and rush of much modern life' (2000: 55), and this is clearly the case in many circumstances. However, walkers in Aberdeen have emphasized that the quality of co-presence in walking is still ubiquitous in everyday circumstances. It is a particularly sociable kind of movement, and this is the basis for our third resonance between walking and anthropological fieldwork. The potential for shared understanding through movement, through walking together, is part of the richness of fieldwork on foot.

Urry's argument about the importance of face-to-face meetings is based on the fact that people are able to look at each other, and this allows them to communicate with far more precision and subtlety than they otherwise could. Urry draws on the work of Georg Simmel (1997 [1907]) who, as part of a concern with social interaction on the level of individuals, wrote about the meanings that sensory perception has for social life. Simmel suggested that the eye has a pre-eminent significance amongst the senses because of the 'extremely lively interaction' with which it weaves people together. Moreover, 'this connection is so strong and delicate that it can only be supported by the shortest line – the straight line between the eyes' (ibid.: 112). The 'line' in this instance is a point-to-point connection between people's heads.

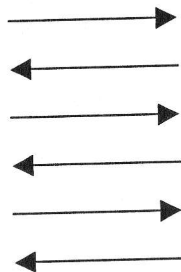
To elaborate, this model of social interaction is of two people standing or, most likely, sitting still, and giving each other their full attention. But walking was often described by our informants as an excellent way of being *with* other people, a very rich way of socializing, to the extent that there seems to be something distinctive about the sociability of walking together. During a shared walk, people very often talk to each other, yet the talking usually involves very little direct eye contact. They are already doing a multitude of other things at the same time, many of which have been discussed in this chapter: observing through all the senses what is going on around them; co-ordinating their bodily movements along a particular route; and often dealing with other paraphernalia such as bags, clothing or mobile phones. To respond to a fellow walker on top of all this might seem difficult, or at least to result in a far weaker social interaction than would be the case in the ideal model of the isolated and immobile dyad, described above.

However, the idea that social interaction in walking occurs 'on top' of all these activities is incorrect. Rather, it is *through* the shared bodily engagement with the

environment, the shared rhythm of walking, that social interaction takes place. People communicate through their posture in movement, involving their whole bodies. Crucially, walking side by side means that participants share virtually the same visual field. We could say that I see what you see as we go along together. In that sense I am with you in my movements, and probably in my thoughts as well. We can talk within and around our shared vista and the other things we are doing along the line of the walk. Participants take it in turns to carry the conversation on, and when not actually speaking one is nevertheless listening, participating silently in the ongoing flow. Thus:



Face-to-face interaction of the kind Simmel describes, on the other hand, is much more confrontational and less companionable, for while one sees the other person's eyes, one does not see what he or she sees. A shared point of view is harder to come by. The conversation that goes on in this context (two people sitting and facing one another) is more like an interview, in which points are batted back and forth:



To return briefly to our introductory remarks, when Geertz was wandering around the village before the cockfight, he would confront villagers face-to-face (and the latter would do their best to avert their gaze). But when he turned to run from the police, he was heading the same way as everyone else. Although Geertz could not have seen into the eyes of the people he was running with (until he sat down to tea), he felt that he formed an immediate social bond with them. By the same token, he felt embodied.

These suggestions may be illustrated from our ethnography. Firstly, the bodily orientations of people walking together can be observed. Generally, each walker is of course facing in the direction being walked. During conversation the head periodically moves slightly towards the fellow walker but not so much as to look at him or her directly. This is presumably to project the voice more clearly towards the other person. However, inclining the head also allows the walker to see the gestures of the body and contributes to the creation of the walking rhythm. The gestures of arms and hands in particular can also be much more open during walking because of the space available around the body. The rhythm, though, is set by more than just the arms and hands. There are usually similarities in the whole aspect of the bodies of people walking together. As an example, the following observations were made on Union Street (the main street of the city) in the late afternoon. Two people in their twenties were walking up the street, talking to each other. Lee noted the following:

> They're walking on the backs of their knees. Not really striding but keeping a straight legged walk. And, they're really wandering. Their pace seems to go in a slightly sort of, it's not a regular stride. One of them comes in front of the other and the other one moves out a bit. … I think they're talking about work.

These two walkers shared a very loose-limbed, wandering gait, with one arm each holding a bag and the other swinging. They did not always walk precisely next to each other, but moved slightly to the side and ahead of each other, and back again, as the walk continued. Their heads inclined towards each other as they spoke. One then turned off Union Street down a side street. For about ten paces, the walk of the person remaining on Union Street stayed the same, moving around the pavement laterally, with a short stride. But then the stride became more regular and straighter. She put earphones in, her head straightened, and she continued up the street.

This small episode is meant to illustrate how social interaction during walking is a full bodily experience. The rhythm when the walkers were together was very strong and distinctive in its looseness of the stride and movement across as well as up the pavement. We are not interested at this stage in the content of the talk, or the gender of the walkers, so much as in the means by which the walkers shared these distinctive bodily orientations. Closeness was produced not simply through the conversation but by sharing the rhythm of walking. When the pair split up, the rhythm continued in the Union Street walker for a short time, and in a sense the interaction seemed to go on for a few seconds after the parting. Then the walker assumed a different rhythm, one much more standard for solo town walkers, with a regular, longer, stride, straight head and straight line on the pavement. This kind of variation lends an additional layer of complexity to the interactionist perspective of Erving Goffman (1971). Goffman described the strategies used to walk in a street in order to avoid collisions and maintain visual awareness. There is still a gap, however, in understanding the personhood that emerges through such activity. This requires that we understand the interactions produced through specific bodily techniques of stepping and movement, rather than just the visual surveillance of other people, or Simmel's lines between the eyes.

Walkers were sometimes quite explicit about the particular kinds of social interaction that could be experienced by walking with someone. During a walk along Aberdeen's beach front, one reflected (unprompted) that 'walking is a very nice rhythm in order to chat and do nice things, to focus on each other as people, rather than get distracted as you would at home'. This is a neat rejoinder to the 'stability' model of social interaction. Walking gives the opportunity to be together, where sharing a rhythm of movement is the basis for shared understanding of each other in a holistic rather than ocularcentric manner: fellow walkers are aware of each other's bodies but rarely actually look *at* each other. In this we see similarities between shared walking and, amongst other activities, some forms of dancing (S. Reed 1998: 520) and martial arts (Kohn 2001). In walking, particularly, people look *with* each other, as we describe above.

The sociability of walking also came through strongly during participant observation with some of the many walking clubs and groups in Aberdeen. Only some of these groups are regarded as 'traditional' hill-walking or mountaineering clubs like the Cairngorm Club or the Scottish Mountaineering Club. Many others operate in workplaces, churches or simply and less formally, amongst regular social groups of friends and families. There are also many walking groups for older people. While these latter were 'officially' for exercise and health benefits, everyone Lee spoke to either volunteered or agreed with the suggestion that the social element was just as important, and, indeed, could not readily be separated from the health aspect. This is also the case for the other groups, including the more traditional hill-walkers.

The idea here is that walkers have a particular way of being together that is more than just co-presence, because it has sociability as the basis for bodily movement. Manifested as a shared rhythm of footsteps and bodily aspect, there is a distinctive sociality in which the togetherness of the walkers has meaning for themselves and for people around them. This overall sociality is central to how and why people walk. It also allows us to expand on our third resonance of walking with anthropological fieldwork. In describing the conjunction of corporeal movement and sociability, an investigation of walking also demonstrates how ethnographic technique emerges from certain alignments of the body and the person. These foundational embodiments are central to the progress of ethnographic research, as Coffey (1999) notes. She writes of the 'physicality' of ethnography, a bodily presence that has to be negotiated during fieldwork. Others have also begun to be aware of the methodological possibilities of sociability in walking as a research technique, particularly from a phenomenological standpoint. Kusenbach (2003) coins the 'go-along' as an *in situ* method, which involves accompanying informants in Los Angeles on their daily street outings and holding a kind of informal interview. 'Talking whilst walking' is also encouraged by Anderson (2004), based on an investigation of environmental activism in southern England. Through shared walking, we can see and feel what is really a learning process of being together, in adjusting one's body and one's speech to the rhythms of others, and of sharing (or at least coming to see) a point of view. Combining this with an awareness of routes – trajectories of movement and their meaning – results in fieldwork sensitive to the richness and reality of people's mobility in the world.

Culture Over the Shoulders or On Foot?

We end by returning one last time to Geertz's flight from the police. He tells us that it was only after having been propelled into the same situation as everyone else, by force of circumstance, that he gained a sense of embodied presence and could begin to participate in the social life of the village. But he then proceeds to treat the whole of that social life as though it were just as disembodied – just as much up in the symbolic clouds – as he himself felt to begin with. That is, social life is refigured in his analysis as a 'text', which he is endeavouring to read. He imagines himself reading such social and cultural texts 'over the shoulders of those to whom they properly belong' (Geertz 1973: 452). 'Reading over the shoulders' is more or less the antithesis of 'walking together', insofar as both the anthropologist and the culture he or she is trying to grasp seem to be floating in thin air. This disembodied stance is reiterated in Geertz's well-known essay on thick description, with its image of humanity 'suspended in webs of significance'. Although he does admit (in deference to Wittgenstein) that ethnographic research is fundamentally about 'finding our feet' (1973: 13), metaphors of support rapidly give way to metaphors of suspension. The ethnographer's job, Geertz claims, is to fix the 'curve of social discourse'. Culture, it seems, is blowing in the wind, just as Geertz felt himself to be blowing in the wind until, forced to run from the police, he found his feet (see also Ingold 1997: 238).

What we can offer, then, is a reversal of Geertzian hyper-suspension. We show how people generally, and ethnographers in particular, literally find their feet by walking with others, and not by reading over their shoulders. We show how the 'webs of significance' in which people are undoubtedly caught up are comprised of trails that are trodden on the ground, not spun in the symbolic ether, as people make their way about. And we show how walking itself can consequently become a practice of understanding, so that the record of the walk, and of the experience it affords, is just as important – and just as valid a source of field material – as the record of the 'discourse' that might have accompanied it. Paying close attention to walking and its ways (both *of* walking and *along* which people walk) may be one of the things that would distinguish a phenomenologically inspired fieldwork practice from the more traditional forms of ethnography primarily designed to support symbolic analysis of the Geertzian kind.

Notes

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2. Given that the preposition 'in' normally implies containment – and hence closure – the phrase 'out in the sun' seems almost self-contradictory. Merleau-Ponty wrote on this. His point was that to be in the open is not to be 'set over against' the space one inhabits, but to merge with it. One does not *see* sunlight but *is* sunlight; what one sees is *in* the light (Merleau-Ponty, 1962: 214; see also Ingold, 2005: 101–2).

3. Thus activists of the 'Living Streets' campaign of the UK Pedestrian Authority see themselves as the 'champions of streets and public spaces for people on foot' (Living Streets 2005).

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